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AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION IN THE NORTHEAST

A radio talk by H. B. Boyd, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, broadcast Wednesday, July 8, 1936, in the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour, by 51 stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company.

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Events of recent weeks have brought out clearly that this country is a group of regions each with its own conditions and its own needs. Drought in the middle west is uppermost in everyone's mind.

Although rain is the only thing which can bring complete relief to the drought states, it is heartening to know that government agencies are cooperating to do everything in their power to allay human suffering, to maintain foundation herds of livestock, and to keep farmers in business on their own farms.

The Adjustment Administration is taking its part in the work, partly through modifications in the Agricultural Conservation Program in the drought states. Fortunately those changes could be made easily, for from the start the program has been organized with the idea of reaching its national goal by methods that fitted the particular needs of each region.

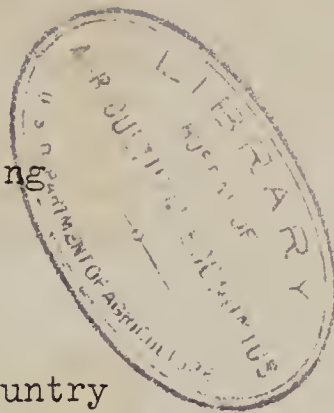
In the east those needs have been different. Recent rains have brought relief to the states below the Potomac. North of the Potomac we have had no serious drought problem. A few days ago, just before Secretary Wallace left on his trip west, he talked to newspaper men about western drought conditions, which by that time were becoming serious. While he answered questions, the sky was a dull gray and rain was beating against his windows.

Just because my work lies in the northeast, I hope I do not sound complacent in these references to our more fortunate weather conditions. Responsibility, as well as decency, demands that we in the northeast look upon the drought as a national problem and do everything we can to support efforts toward relief. But at the same time we must go ahead with the work of fitting the national program to the needs of the northeast.

By this time I believe it is safe to say that a sound beginning has been made. The people of New England and the middle Atlantic states learned long ago that their land was unfitted for constant cropping, and that much of it should be in grass and trees.

Jared Eliot, who in his time was perhaps the keenest observer of farm problems in the colonies, saw in the middle of the 1700's how quickly the soil of New England showed the effects of an exhausting cropping system. I'll read just a bit of his good clear prose that he wrote in 1747 at Killingworth, Connecticut, on Long Island Sound. Now I'm quoting:

(over)



"When our forefathers settled here they entered a land which probably never had been ploughed since the Creation; the land being new, they depended upon the natural fertility of the ground, which served their purpose very well, and when they had worn out one piece they cleared the other, without any concern to amend their land, except a little helped by a little fold and cart dung... Our lands being thus worn out, I suppose to be one reason why so many are inclined to remove to new places so they may raise wheat."

Jared Eliot was not the first man to recognize the problem, or to find the best answer. A hundred years earlier, not many years after the Pilgrims had landed, the people of Springfield passed a resolution about the use of hay and pasture land. They specified that each person who had cattle or horses should have enough grass to support the animals, and that even those who had no animals should have at least three acres of mowing ground.

There we have the roots of the present program--plenty of land in pasture and hayland, and careful maintenance of that soil-conserving land. All that is added is the machinery for achieving that end--payments that cover part of the cost of taking those steps to improve the region's soil by starting at home on individual farms.

The changes in detail that have been made already this year, and that may still be made may seem a bit confusing at first glance, but they do not blur the main lines of the program; they just fit the program more closely to conditions as we find them.

Reports in the past few days indicate that the farmers of the northeast, after looking at the program carefully, even cautiously, have more and more come to feel that it meets their needs, and enables them to cooperate in a national effort at the same time they are laying the foundations for better income from their own farms. Less than three weeks ago, reports from state committees showed that nearly 59,000 farmers in the northeast had filled out worksheets, which is the first step in taking part in the program, even though it is in no sense binding, as a contract would be. More recent reports, some of them coming up to the first of July, show that over 71,000 worksheets have been turned in.

The final total will be larger, for many worksheets undoubtedly have been filed since the count was made; and some time still remains, even though the summer is well advanced.

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